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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

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This issue of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* begins with a Forum on "Nontraditional Honors Students." We distributed the lead essay titled "Nontraditional Honors," by Janice Rye Kinghorn of Miami University Middletown and Whitney Womack Smith of Miami University Hamilton, on the NCHC website, on the listserv, and in NCHC e-Newletters several months in advance, and we invited contributors to consider the following questions:

What is the definition of "nontraditional students," and why do they need their own category? Is there any such thing as a traditional student? Do honors programs have a social, moral, or economic incentive or responsibility to accommodate nontraditional students? What are good ideas for recruiting them? Are some kinds of honors programs, e.g., those focusing on the liberal arts, more easily able to accommodate nontraditional students than others are? What specific advantages do nontraditional students bring to honors? Are there down sides to increasing the numbers of nontraditional students in an honors program, and, if so, what are they? Do nontraditional students participate as fully, less fully, or more fully in extracurricular honors activities than nontraditional students do? Do the curricular and co-curricular requirements of honors programs work for nontraditional, non-residential students? Is a cadre of alumni and alumnae who were nontraditional honors students a benefit to, for instance, fundraising? Does the current state of the national and global economy have an impact on the role nontraditional students can and do play in honors?

Including the lead essay, the Forum features five essays. The authors are unanimous in asserting the mutually beneficial relationship between nontraditional students and honors programs.

Janice Rye Kinghorn and Whitney Womack Smith begin the conversation by making the case that actively recruiting and welcoming nontraditional students into honors programs is right not only for the students but for the programs. Given the changing demographics in the United States, nontraditional students may be crucial to the future of honors. Having directed honors

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programs at commuter campuses of Miami University Ohio, the authors share experiences and insights about attracting students who have scheduling conflicts as well as valid hesitations about joining an honors program. The strategies they have adopted include credit for experience and for extracurricular activities, hybrid courses, targeted promotional materials, and a mentor system.

Picking up on Kinghorn and Smith's acknowledgement that "traditional" and "nontraditional" are constructed terms, Nancy Reichert sets about to deconstruct them in "Signifying Difference: The Nontraditional Student and the Honors Program." She argues that the term "traditional" brings to mind students who have "banked test scores, AP and honors coursework, and high grades" in high school, and so "nontraditional" implies that students have not banked these assets and are thus defined by what they lack. Supported by the diverse views of students she polled electronically in her honors program at Southern Polytechnic State University, Reichert argues that "nontraditional students need to be measured by what they bring to an honors program instead of by what they lack." She then describes a variety of strategies that her honors program has adopted to create equal opportunities for nontraditional students.

Angela Salas, like Reichert and also like Kinghorn and Smith, teaches at a campus that especially attracts nontraditional students. In "Nontraditional Honors and the Hopefulness of Summer Reading," Salas describes her experience in trying to find pedagogical strategies that work in her first-year honors sequence, Common Intellectual Experience, at Indiana University Southeast. Having tried already to move from instructor- to student-led formats, she had encountered some resistance and frustration among her students. Reading Kinghorn and Smith's essay helped her understand the insecurities her students were feeling as well as the scheduling problems they faced, so she tried adding an online component to the honors courses, a strategy she plans to both continue and expand in her efforts "to meet the needs of nontraditional students with nontraditional courses."

In "Mothers in Honors," Mimi Killinger, Rachel Binder-Hathaway, Paige Mitchell, and Emily Patrick eloquently describe the challenges that mothers face as honors students in the University of Maine Honors College. A photograph that Killinger took of her three co-authors and their children is featured on the cover of this issue of *JNCHC*. These three honors students describe the obstacles they encounter in, for instance, class scheduling, differences between them and their classmates, occasional insensitivity from their instructors, and a general sense of alienation. At the same time, their self-descriptions and Killinger's commentary vividly demonstrate the rich contributions they make to their honors classes and classmates as well as the

benefits they receive from the honors college. All four authors offer suggestions for changing both the culture and policies of honors to encourage students like them to participate more fully and in greater numbers.

Kimberly Aramburo and Suketu Bhavsar describe another category of nontraditional honors students in “Undocumented in Honors.” Usually encumbered by difficult backgrounds, educational deprivations, and economic hardships as well as legal roadblocks, the Dreamers face overwhelming challenges. With no legal identity, undocumented honors students may work harder and achieve more than other students even without the financial aid, job possibilities, or options for graduate education that motivate their classmates. Dreamers are increasingly likely to become honors students in all parts of the country, and honors administrators and faculty need to recognize the seemingly insurmountable obstacles in their path and make special efforts to help. The authors of this essay provide an invaluable list of seven ways to provide such help effectively.

Each year, the NCHC selects four outstanding student researchers as NCHC Portz Scholars, who then present their research at the annual conference. On rare occasions, the editors of *JNCHC* select one of the NCHC Portz Scholars’ essays for publication, and we are proud to include in this issue a winning essay by Jeffrey Cisneros of the University of Texas at San Antonio. In “John Boswell: Posting Historical Landmarks at the Leading Edge of the Culture Wars,” Cisneros presents the results of his research on one of the most prominent and controversial scholars of early Christianity’s stance on homosexuality. Boswell’s book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, published in 1980, argued that, as Cisneros writes, “the rise in secular hostility was what ultimately led to church proscriptions, not the other way around” and that denunciations of homosexuality on the basis of natural law had their basis in historical circumstances rather than early Christian doctrine. Boswell’s book made him a target for attacks by both the conservative religious community, which was committed to the idea that homosexuality had always been considered a sin in the Christian church, and also by the gay community, which was invested in the belief that the church was hostile to homosexuality. Cisneros gives a vivid and fascinating account of the nature of these attacks and how they played out in an academic setting.

We conclude this issue of *JNCHC* with two qualitative research essays. The first is “Meeting the Aims of Honors in the Online Environment” by Melissa L. Johnson of the University of Florida. Johnson argues that online courses, when carefully designed and delivered, can meet all the primary objectives of honors education, including pedagogical, curricular, and experiential innovation. She presents the results of a survey she conducted on the

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NCHC listserv, focusing on interviews with five faculty members who had taught online courses. While the results indicated problems as well as assets in teaching online honors courses, important recommendations arose from the study, in particular the need for models and mentors as more honors faculty commence online teaching. Johnson suggests good resources that could help NCHC guide and encourage online teaching among its members.

We conclude this issue of *JNCHC* with "Assessing Rigor in Experiential Education: A Working Model from Partners in the Parks" by John S. MacLean of Southern Utah University and Brian J. White of Graceland University. MacLean and White point out that experiential education relies on "unpredictable learning opportunities" that arise as students explore on their own, and so faculty, in order to demonstrate the practical and theoretical rigor of experience-based courses, have to create "assessment models without having solid control over the content or the methods of content-delivery." Based on the 2012 Partners in the Parks adventure in Sequoia National Park, MacLean and White present a valuable model for assessment that includes inquiry, exploration, discovery, analysis, and reflection, culminating in honors projects that require students to understand the curriculum, incorporate unpredictable outcomes, and apply these outcomes to themselves and their communities.